The Girl Next Door

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Life was pretty standard for Mary Jane Watson before the incident that almost destroyed Midtown High. With things taking a drastic change, and for the worse, Mary Jane begins to struggle with the changes in her life. And it's times like this where she needs her friends by her side. But how could they be by her side if they don't go to the same school? This is her story.

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Horizon High

A/N: Hello. :) I was watching the new Spider-Man 2017 series, and I gotta say it is "Amazing". Get it? Though, I do have one complaint about it, and that is: "Why isn't Mary Jane involved in this show?" Turns out, she was, but not as a main character, only appearing in unconfirmed cameos, as far as I know, apart from the one confirmation in the episode "Venom". So again, why isn't she more involved? This would be my attempt to remedy that while she goes through her own adventure through her own point of view. And no, it doesn't mean she will get super powers (not yet, at least). For now, I want to focus on Mary Jane's character as a normal person, and I feel it important to have buildup for it. Needless to say, her involvement with Spider-Man will come in time. For now, it's time we look at things her way. Also, she will be portrayed by Mae Whitman, as to her voice.

Prologue: "Horizon High"

My name is Mary Jane Watson. Before you even ask what happened, it started out like any other day. I'd always wake up in the morning (with some help from my alarm clock), eat breakfast, brush my teeth, get ready for school (including getting dressed in my blue jean jacket, my pink shirt with a tie at the bottom, and my shorts), that sort of thing. You could even say it was the norm for me. At least it was before today, anyway. But life's not always that simple. For one, my school, Midtown High was about to receive the honor of getting an audience with renowned head of Horizon High: Max Modell.

He was always an idol to a lot of Midtown's students, especially to my neighbor, Peter Parker. I'm not exaggerating about that neighbor part, by the way. He literally lives just next door to me. On top of that, we go to the same school together. Though, it's somewhat of a relief that we're in different classes. We are different people after all. But that's beside the point. The point is, starting that day, everything would start going crazy.

It didn't happen immediately, thank goodness. So, while we were getting comfortable, before everything went off the rails, our main focus was to pay attention to Max Modell, especially since he had a lot to teach us. My main focus was finding a seat away from either Flash Thompson or Alistair before anything else, to tell the truth. Even if he wasn't such a bully, Flash would be way too chummy with me since I'm part of the cheerleading squad. And I just knew Alistair would be a nutcase about it. Rather than put up with that, I felt it best to keep as much of my distance as I can before enjoying whatever Modell had to offer. By that point, Liz would be the speaker to address him before the presentation.

"Welcome, students of Midtown High. It isn't often a scientist gets called a genius within his lifetime. But when he creates a private school for young minds looking to pursue their dreams, we also get to call him a role model."

Heh. Hearing her say that, it actually made me smile a bit. Whether or not she knew, it's not often that you hear a good joke from her.

"Ladies and Gentleman, I give you... Max Modell from Horizon High!"

Now keep in mind, a lot of students were excited about him being here, so you can understand the applause that almost made my ears ring. Almost... if Max hadn't settled them down, they would have rang. He was dressed in a blue shirt with messy blonde khakis, complete with glasses, a mustache, and a goatee to go with it. At first, I didn't get why everyone was so excited. He seemed like any other person to me.

"Good evening, everyone. You know, I could spend a lot of time talking about the cool things we're doing at Horizon High."

As I suspected, Alistair was no fan of his, so it didn't surprise me that he tried a spitball maneuver. What did surprise me, on the other hand, was what happened after. When the spitball should've hit him, his body started flickering, and it just went right through him! Looks like he knew what he was doing. As if that weren't enough, Modell was sitting directly in front of Alistair this whole time. And Peter, from where I was sitting, though he's the most excited.

"Like I said, I *could* talk about them. But I'd rather show you with our new hologram prototype."

And just like that, his whole hologram just disappeared from the bottom up. If that setup wasn't an eye catcher, I didn't know what was. I gotta give Max credit. He really knows how to put on a show. Not like Tony Stark, but he's a showstopper in his own right.

"Created by the fertile minds of Horizon High. For I'm excited to say, we have one last slot that needs to be filled this semester."

Almost immediately, most of everyone inside got excited and tried to raise their hands. Peter was the first to try to raise his, and he would've been if he didn't put it back down. It's a good thing for him that Max isn't just here to handpick a candidate.

"It's not that simple. You see, in order to be a student at Horizon, you have to have a certain intellect."

To explain, his hand dug into the pocket and got out what looked like a small chip before casually chucking it aside. Turns out, it was another demonstration of the hologram projects, this time in the form of a holographic chalkboard detailing what looked like the hardest math problem to a lot of people who'd flake on tests.

"An intellect that can solve an equation like this, for example. An intellect like Anya Corazon or Miles Morales, students at Horizon who specialize in the elemental physics."

On cue, two more students came from behind the curtain. The girl, who I'm guessing is Anya, had long brown hair just a bit over shoulder length, and Miles, had a black jacket around him.

Honestly, I expected its students to be at college-grade level, but... they looked no older than some of us here. I was already liking where this is going.

"Anya and Miles are not only some of the most skilled physicians, but also some of the youngest experts of physics in the entire world. And in the area of chemistry, our very own Harry Osborn."

A surprise appearance by Harry Osborn? Now, this definitely got the

crowd rearing for a cheer already, especially me and Peter. See, me, Peter, and Harry were best friends growing up. I can't tell you all the details, but what I can tell you is how much they made an impact in my life. He and Peter were like another family to me. And it says a lot considering what happened to my parents... but, I'm not ready to tell you that part of my life just yet, or ever. It's not the most important thing to discuss, anyway.

"Thanks, Max. At Horizon High, kids are doing things they could've only dreamed of before, like Anya and the Vibranium reactor. Anya?"

"Once, Vibranium could only be found in the nation of Wakanda. But, with my Vibranium reactor, there'll be enough Vibranium to span the entire state of New York, ushering in a new—"

When Anya pushed a button on her reactor, I could tell something was wrong with it. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out with the sparks around it. The next thing I knew, it sent a blast to the roof before it sent a shockwave just above our heads. It was a good thing it did that above us, because if it didn't, it would have cut our heads off. Either way, I could safely say this was not part of the show. So, like everyone else, I had to make an exit. It was way too close to being a kill zone for my taste. But while I ran out of the amphitheater, I realized something that drive me to come back: Peter wasn't around, and neither was Harry for that matter.

It made me worried really fast. Did they get left behind, or stay to try and fix it? Whatever happened, they were putting themselves in danger. So I had to go back to get them. Turns out, it was a big mistake. Because the instant I went back inside the amphitheater, a blast from that generator lashed out just near me faster than I could react and attacked the wall next to me. Then, just as I was beginning to reconsider staying in here any longer, I was surprised to see someone in a red and blue sweatsuit and mask swinging to the rescue.

I've heard of this guy before. Word actually gets around pretty fast in Queens. In fact, the cops said the burglar didn't want to be left with the spider creep. He must be the guy that burglar was talking about. Of course, I saw Harry just beneath the generator, so I didn't have to

worry about finding him, but... maybe that guy could help me find Peter. Of course, it would've been handy to know his name, but I didn't. Needless to say, I struggled with that a bit.

"Hey! Spider... uh, guy!"

Whoever that guy was, I definitely got his attention. But he really wasn't happy that I was around.

"What are you doing here? You have to go!"

"Not without Peter! I need to be sure he's okay!"

The generator in the room didn't really give me much choice, though, because a shockwave started coming up, and this one... was about to be aimed at me. Right then and there, it should've been it. But, when I prepared for the end, that... man, (I think?) used his webs to get me away from the impact zone beside Harry and the others. It was a surprise, mostly because I really thought I was a goner, but even Harry knew better than to take chances he knew couldn't take. Still, he's got to at least be concerned about his friend.

"C'mon, MJ! We have to get out of here!"

"But what about Peter?!"

"He's probably taken an emergency exit! Let's go!"

Of course. No wonder he wasn't around, I thought. Peter must've taken a gamble since the emergency exits were closest to the generator. Hopefully, he got lucky and got out. So, those of us who were stuck had to leave the school while we left everything to that Spider-Guy...

A half-hour later, the collisions seemed to have died down. I'm surprised that Midtown wasn't destroyed in the process. But, in that time, I was forced to wait with my class for the officials to see if anyone was hurt. Unfortunately, it meant that I couldn't look for Peter to see if he was hurt. Good thing was, I didn't have to wait very long. The whole school was cleared of any dangerous situation, and we were allowed back in. Still, I couldn't help but wonder what Peter was thinking back then.

For the rest of the school day, I was left to wonder if Peter ever really did make it out alive. I haven't seen him since the incident, but it's mainly because of my classes that I didn't see him. Hopefully, I could see him just next door, like I usually do every day. When school was over, I looked over to the houses on my left, seeing two houses that had lights on. Normally, I'd go to the closest one, but after what's happened, I decided to go to to the farthest house. I needed to be sure how he's holding up. When I knocked on the door, his guardian, Aunt May was the first to answer, and boy was she surprised.

"Oh! Mary Jane. What brings you here?"

"Is Peter still around? I want to check up with him on something."

"Oh, I heard about what happened today. It was quite dangerous."

She heard about this? Hold on. At this point, it wouldn't surprise me. After what just happened, it's going to be the only thing anyone would ever talk about. But how did she hear about it unless it's from... Peter?

"So... he's okay?"

"A little shaken up, but I think he should be okay."

It was a relief to hear it from her. I know she'd never lie to anyone. It's just not in her character to do that. Grateful as I was, I still wanted to see him for myself.

"Can I check up with him, May?"

"Of course. He's just upstairs in his room. I'll bring him down for you."

"It's okay. I can go upstairs myself. But thank you."

That was definitely not how I pictured my first time in his house. I'd have thought it'd be because Aunt Anna would finally have decided to change things up with our visiting days. Speaking of, I hope I didn't make her more worried than usual... Aunt Anna aside, I might be worried just as sick about what could've happened to him myself.

As I cautiously walked to his door and opened it, Peter was in here, alright. But, somehow he didn't look too happy. What happened to him that made him like this? Apparently, it was all I thought about when the door screeched open. It caught me off guard as easily as it did him when he saw me at the door. He was probably expecting Aunt May to comfort him.

"MJ?"

It's official. I was busted.

"Uh... hi?"

"W-What are you doing in my house?"

I could tell he was confused. And it's not hard to see why. Usually after school, my house would be the first place to go to. I guess it's a special occasion to do otherwise.

"I haven't seen you since the incident. I had to check on you and see how you're holding up."

"Oh. Well, I'm.. doing just fine, actually."

"Then why do you look so upset?"

Little did I know then that it was going to be a mistake to ask that. If I had minded my own business, things would've been back to normal. But, then again, I would've found out sooner or later. So what could it really have changed? Probably nothing.

"Okay. I don't know how to say it, MJ, but... I got good news and bad news. After the generator was disabled, by Spider- *Man* , by the way, I solved Max's equation and put out the fires. After that, Max Modell was really proud of what I did, and starting next week, I get to go to Horizon."

Hearing this piece of news first, I couldn't help but be proud of him. This morning, he didn't think he had a chance. And look at him now.

"Really? That sounds great. But... what's the bad news?"

"Harry was blamed for tinkering with the Vibranium generator before the introduction, and... pending investigation, Harry is suspended from Horizon High."

"What?!"

Osborn Academy

A/N: And here is the second chapter of my story based on Spider-Man's 2017 series. Now, here, you could expect a certain dilemma that comes from Harry's suspension from Horizon High. The toll it takes will lead Mary Jane to take a different path. How so, you ask? To find out, all you need do is read…

Chapter 1: Osborn Academy

This was quite a pill to swallow for me. Harry Osborn, accused of sabotage in the presentation in Midtown High. I just couldn't believe that was actually happening. He couldn't have...! There's just no way! They don't know Harry like Peter and I do! Not like it mattered to everyone else, least of all the Smythes...

Turns out, Alistair's dad was the one who framed him. I mean, I always knew they hated Harry for being selected, but to go so far as to do *that* to him?! How could they?! It's not fair! And I'm not the only one who felt that way, but the problem was, Peter looked at it differently.

Peter felt that it wasn't fair that he got to go to Horizon while Harry got the boot. We both know it's while the investigation was being conducted, but still, Peter just didn't feel right about it. But somehow, Harry wasn't really so mad about Peter going. In fact, he was happy for him. And I'm glad that the two of them are still friends despite how the situation went down after the Midtown Incident, but there was one problem I didn't count on.

For a week since the incident, Harry has been with me in my Chemistry class for the 3rd period until the investigation is over. I'm grateful that I get to have him with me by my side, but I can tell he's been getting more... on edge. He's really mad at Alistair for what his father did to him. As much as I felt vindicated that someone else saw the Smythes for who they were, I was still worried about what he could do. But that's not even the worst of it. He thinks that Spider-Man had a hand in his suspension. It just made no sense to

me why Harry would believe that when he just saved him. In the end, though, despite Harry being around, I... I felt like I was alone all over again.

A few days since then, that's how I've always felt. And I wasn't the only one. Mr. Salerno, my chemistry teacher, felt as though he's losing a lot of good students, including Peter. So, when Max Modell went and recruited him to Horizon High, he got a little upset. Since then, he started petitioning to stop Max from recruiting at Midtown. Like that would change anything. In fact, it only stopped things from getting any better.

His petition was actually putting a dent in my plan to go to Horizon High. Before Salerno's whole petition, I wanted to work as hard as I could to be better, to go with Harry and Peter to Horizon together, just like old times. It could've been delayed for another year, but at least I'd be with them again. Except, his petition made that impossible. I was angry, but I can't really blame him when he actually cares about his students. The way things are, it looked like I was destined to be alone (with the exception of Peter as my neighbor). That is, until I heard my phone ringing one weekend.

Prior to that, I just wanted to sleep the day away, like any other kid would on a Saturday. With the ringing dragging on, I just wanted to stay in bed, but I knew it wouldn't stop unless I turn off my phone. When I tried to turn it off, though, I was surprised to know that Harry was the one calling me.

I became so excited that I thought of a lot of things. One of them was that maybe he was back in Horizon, that he was proven innocent. Another was that he found out who framed him and got them suspended or arrested. Either way, my excitement got the better of me as I practically shouted into my phone.

"Hello?!"

"Hey, MJ. Someone sounds excited."

I probably should've calmed down first before I responded.

"Yeah, sorry about that, Harry. So, what's up? Did you get back in

Horizon yet?"

"No, not yet. But I've got something better to tell you."

"Really? What's that?"

"My dad has a special announcement this morning. It's on the news. I think you'd be surprised."

Honestly, I didn't really care much about his father as I did Harry, but I decided to play along and find out what the surprise was. Speaking of, my Aunt Anna had a surprise of her own when she saw me out of bed this early in the morning. She usually had to call me down when she finished making breakfast for me, so you can imagine how curious it was for her to see me up this early. I wanted to explain why, but I didn't have much time for it other than a few words as I circled to the living room.

"Mary Jane, what are you doing out of bed?"

"Hey, Aunt Anna. Just checking on something Harry was telling me about."

"Well, make sure to come in here for breakfast after."

The moment I clicked on the TV, I saw Norman Osborn as the main attraction, standing in the penthouse of his own building. At the moment, I thought he was going to call it an outrage that his son was framed. I knew I was. But why would Harry have me look at that? There's gotta be more to it, I thought. And there was.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pride and honor that I personally unveil... Osborn Academy."

On the TV, the whole crowd cheered. From what I could tell, his whole penthouse space was the school itself. His father was willing to set up a whole school there? I... I had no word for any of this. Harry must've guessed that when he spoke again.

"Pretty speechless, huh? And guess what? I'm going there as a school until the investigation is taken care of."

"What? Harry, th— that's great!"

"I know, right? You should come check it out when you can. And bring Peter, too."

"Okay. See you later."

That was the plan, but Aunt Anna's voice put a stop to that quickly. And it was pretty obvious what it was about.

"Mary Jane!"

"After I eat my breakfast."

Once I finished my breakfast, I told Aunt Anna about what Harry was showing me. She said I could go, but told me I needed to be careful around Peter. It seemed out of nowhere to me, but she doesn't really trust him as much as she trusts Aunt May. Luckily for her, Peter seemed to be missing. I thought he must've got a head start for the Oscorp building, so I went alone with Aunt Anna driving me over.

The crowd was basically packed when we arrived there. Somehow, you'd just know there'd be traffic jams. It's a good thing it was a big building, because if it wasn't, it would've spanned across the whole city. It didn't really change our situation much, but at least we had somewhere to park by the building. Of course, the main event is in the penthouse, so the crowds would still be a problem. Aunt Anna found a workaround to that, fortunately, but I still felt like I was being babied.

"Now, make sure not to let go of my hand, Mary Jane."

"Aunt Anna, I'm not a little kid!"

"That doesn't make you any less likely to get lost."

I grumbled at what she had to say, but she had a point. Anyone could get lost in a crowd this massive. It'd be pretty lucky if they didn't. Anyway, we went inside the building and then up to the

penthouse in the elevator. When the door opened, that's when Aunt Anna and I saw Harry, with a blend of other students who were interested in the event.

Frankly, I expected it to be a huge crowd, but there was only about 11 people, 13 if you counted me and my aunt. I guess the adults were the ones taking up the bottom level of Oscorp for some kind of census to get their kids in. Whatever the case was, I'm just glad to see Harry was doing well considering how he'd been acting in Midtown.

"Harry!"

"Hey, MJ. What kept you guys?"

"Ever heard of being fashionably late?"

As much as it gave Harry a smile, I couldn't help that he was wondering about someone else. I could tell from how his eyes were looking around me.

"Speaking of late, where's Pete?"

This came as a surprise to me, too. I assumed he was getting a head-start, but I don't see Peter anywhere here. Parker, you've really dropped the ball this time.

"I don't know. I thought he was getting a head-start here. Must be bad traffic considering the crowds here."

Aunt Anna didn't really see it as bad news as far as she was concerned.

"Well, I just hope that he never comes here. That boy is not to be trusted, if you ask me."

"Aunt Anna, we talked about this. Peter's not a bad person."

"Then how can you explain his constant absences? I'm telling you, he's up to something!"

'Awkward,' was all I had to think about this moment. I wanted to

support my best friend, not get caught up in her paranoia. I understand that she cares about me, but it's still a little overwhelming when she treats me like a kid. Not that I'd blame her with what I went through with my parents... Wait, why am I even talking about this?

"Uh, okay. Can me and Harry have some space, please?"

I'll admit I was a little worried when Aunt Anna looked between me and Harry. I haven't told her about how he'd been acting in Midtown since he got suspended, but I was afraid she'd find out.

"Alright, Mary Jane. Just be careful, and make sure not to get lost in crowds."

As Aunt Anna walked away from the two of us, I was relieved that she agreed to it. Then again, I shouldn't be surprised. Out of the two best friends I have in my life, Aunt Anna automatically trusted Harry the most. In her point of view, he didn't have anything to hide, and he was always there for me. Peter was a different story, though.

Ever since his Uncle Ben died, Peter just didn't sit well with her. One point, Aunt Anna even called him, 'a burden on poor Aunt May.' I told her that she wasn't being fair to judge him so quickly, that he was just grieving. Later on, her stark opinion died down some and called him secretive. She didn't take too well with those kinds of people, which kinda made it hard for her to leave my side with the exception of school, even if it's just for a little while. I'm just happy she's at least *trying* to give me some space to myself... Even Harry knew she could get... clingy.

"That's your Aunt Anna, huh?"

I don't know why, but it felt embarrassing for Harry to see my Aunt ranting about her suspicions towards Peter, especially since he's his best friend, too. Honestly, I was just as embarrassed myself.

"Yeah. Sorry you had to see that."

"Nah, it's okay. Maybe I'll try calling him myself."

"Good idea. And while you do that, maybe I could look around and

see if he's somewhere in here. Maybe check this place out a little while I'm at it."

"That'll work."

That was my plan, of course. But as I walked around the penthouse, I didn't have any luck finding him. Maybe Aunt Anna was right about being lost in a crowd after all. How could a crowd this small make this so confusing? Then, somehow or another, I ended up bumping into someone's back. When I heard a loud 'oof!' from behind me, I started trying to apologize before I set a bad first impression.

"Sorry. I didn't see you back there..."

When I turned around, though, it wasn't a random kid in the background I came across. It was the very man who owned Oscorp Industries. He was also the same man who took the trouble of converting a penthouse into a school for Harry's sake.

"Norman Osborn?"

"In person."

I could practically feel the authority from his eyes as they looked at me up and down. A part of me felt like I was being scanned. I was a little worried about that, since I didn't actually meet him in person before. A little bit later, though, Norman began to smile at me.

"And you must be this Mary Jane Watson I've heard about."

I got a little surprised a bit by what he said then. Was Harry talking about me to his dad? Maybe he must've been trying to warm him up to me in advance. Judging from the smile, I felt I got nothing to worry about. So far, at least...

"Uh... yeah. That's me. It's, uh... great to meet you."

Without thinking, I got my hand out to shake his. Truth be told, I should've counted on it, but I never thought I'd bump into Norman Osborn, let alone shake hands with him. Just like that, my initial plan to look for Peter just poofed away and immediately changed to making a good first impression with him and hoping I don't choke.

"It's a pleasure to meet you as well."

"So, you said Harry talked about me?"

"Of course. He told me how you always stood by his side. A true example of loyalty."

"Thanks. It's no big deal, really."

"Nonsense. In times like this, it's hard to know who you can depend on anymore."

Leave it to Norman to make things dramatic. But, I guess he was right about that. Harry must've gotten frustrated since it seemed like nobody had his back throughout this whole fiasco. And speaking of Harry, I started to hear his voice from behind me.

"Dad? What's going on over here?"

"Nothing, son. Mary Jane and I were just getting ourselves introduced."

Harry looked over to me to see if I was okay since his dad could get pretty intense, according to him.

"MJ, he didn't scare you, did he?"

"Harry, I'm fine. I just... bumped into him is all."

"And I'm grateful that you did. Because as it happens, I have something important to discuss with you. That is, if it's not too pressing for you."

Of course it's too pressing for me! Being asked to discuss something important right off the bat is kind of a big deal. I wanted to tell him no, but something about this conversation would change his opinion about me if I did. And I didn't want to be alone again... so I had to agree to it, though Harry was trying to help me out.

"MJ, it's okay if you don't want to."

"No, Harry. It's okay. I'll be fine."

"Well, okay. If you need me, I'll be waiting near the entrance for Peter. I found out he's running a little late."

Oh, right. That's Peter Parker for you.

"Okay. See you then."

While Harry walked over to the entrance, Norman put his arm around me and took the opportunity to speak with me as we ended up walking over by the windows.

"I'm sure you must be wondering what gave me the idea to concert this penthouse into a school."

"Um, actually, yeah."

"Believe it or not, it can give the students in New York something to reach for. Especially students like you."

I never thought of it like that. Norman must've put some thought into it. Maybe too much thought... I had a feeling then and there that I knew what that important thing was.

"Students like me? What are you trying to say?"

"Well, the truth is, since Horizon High has suspended Harry, I didn't want to feel like a bridge is burning between the two of you."

He really made me blush from those words. Did he really think that me and Harry were a couple? That was kinda embarrassing to think about this early.

"What? You think we're— No. W-We're not dating. Although, when I think about it, I... I guess we get along pretty well."

"That's all I need to know. That being said, I'm wondering if you'd be interested in going to Osborn Academy yourself."

There we go. That's what it was about. He's already trying to get more students into Osborn Academy. But he's got other people to do that for him, right? So, why would he talk to me himself...? None of it was adding up.

"You... want me to go to Oz Academy?"

"But of course. You've done a great service to my son with your support. It just wouldn't be right for me if I didn't repay the debt."

Whoa. That was... actually nicer than I expected it to be. An offer to go to Osborn Academy. Just like that, my dream of being with my friends again was being built back up. It's like he was giving me hope. But then, I remembered someone who wouldn't be too hot about me leaving.

"Mr. Osborn, that's... that's a very generous offer for you to make. And I want to take it, very badly, but... I can't."

My answer didn't immediately dishearten him. In fact, he showed a look of compassion to me, another thing I didn't expect from Norman.

"Well, what's stopping you?"

"It's Mr. Salerno. Since Horizon began recruiting students from Midtown, he's becoming upset about losing his best students. He even started petitioning against it. What if... what if he started petitioning against you, too? Then I'd have nowhere to go. I can't go anywhere..."

I was looking out at the window then, but I could tell he felt bad for me. Wouldn't surprise me if anyone did, really. I was always a charity case since my mom and dad split up. Then, the former died from a weak heart and I was left alone with my aunt. It was the most miserable I've ever felt... Wait. Why am I even talking about this?

"I wouldn't count yourself out just yet."

"Why not? It's not like he'd ever let me go."

"You'd be surprised how much can happen if one makes the effort."

Norman Osborn giving me advice? How many times is he going to surprise me like this? It's almost like... like he cares about me. Did Harry bring that side of him out? Because if so, I'd like to thank him for this.

"Thanks, Mr. Osborn. I'll consider it."

I started to walk away but Norman actually had one last thing to say to me.

"Please. Call me Norman."

I smiled back to him as a reply to his words. Honestly, I felt... odd about it. But he did seem willing to help me out of my rut. Maybe I should tell Mr. Salerno after all. The question was... how do I tell him about it?

Since that day, I've spent the rest of the weekend trying to come up with how to explain my situation to Mr. Salerno. I thought about writing a note, but it'd seem rude to do it in the middle of class. And I really wasn't that type of person to do it anyway. I came up with a bunch of other ideas after that, but in the long run, I decided to talk to him after class. Five minutes would be all the time I need, however it ends. Problem was, I was a little anxious about how he'd feel about it for the rest of the period. When the bell rang, I felt my anxiety hit fever pitch as he was dismissing the class.

"Alright. Everyone make sure to remember your homework for the day."

One by one, the students all walked out of the classroom while I was sitting by myself, just twiddling my thumbs in a vain attempt to lower my stress. Unfortunately, it didn't work as Mr. Salerno noticed my unease.

"Mary Jane?"

"Uh, yes?"

"Any particular reason why you're so... nervous?"

Here it comes, I thought. This is where the truth comes out. Whatever happens, at least I tried. I got up from my own seat and walked towards Mr. Salerno before I began to tell him everything.

"Mr. Salerno... can I tell you something?"

"Of course. What is it?"

"You know the unveiling of Osborn Academy a couple days back?"

"Of course. It would explain why Harry wasn't in my class today."

"I've just been asked if I was interested in going there."

Mr. Salerno didn't quite like the idea about where it was going, but I could tell he's trying to be understanding.

"So... you want to go to Oz Academy, huh?"

I gave him a solemn nod as an answer. My anxiety was getting the better of me in that moment, so I assumed he'd tell me that he wouldn't accept it. But I didn't notice the smile he had on his face when I tried to explain.

"I know how you feel about it, but—"

"Okay. You can go."

"What?"

"I know all too well about how it feels to lose the people you're connected with. That was the whole reason I started a petition against Max Modell. I know he didn't mean to be inconsiderate, but... it's just how I feel. Besides, it's my duty as a teacher to help them learn the best way possible. And, seeing as you became a little anxious for the past week, I think Oz Academy might be something that can help you."

When I heard his answer, I was... stunned. I expected him to say no and keep me from going, but here he was, just willing to let me go.

"Mr. Salerno, I... I don't know what to say. Thank you for understanding. It means a lot to me."

"I imagine it does. See you on the other side."

With a smile, he held out his hand to me before I shook it. From that moment on, things will be different. I wouldn't feel alone anymore... I don't know how long it'll last, but at least I'll get somewhere after what I've been through...

After school, I told Aunt Anna about how Mr. Salerno agreed to let me go to Osborn Academy. Naturally, she was worried about my tuitions, but as it turned out, Norman would cover the expenses for me since I've been a good friend to Harry, which is yet another reason she preferred him over Peter. Anyway, all I needed to do was to make it official. So, that same night, I went with Aunt Anna to the Oscorp Building where Norman was about to close up for the day when he noticed me. When the two of us got out of the car and out to the main entrance, Aunt Anna couldn't help but feel happy for me.

"I'm so proud of you, Mary Jane, dear. If only your mother could see you now."

Yeah. If only... I was tempted to be sad in that moment, but Norman gave me the strong feeling to put it aside as I looked up to him and shook his hand as he spoke with a proud tone in his voice.

"Mary Jane Watson... welcome to Osborn Academy."